

The Judging of Jurgen

Great Tumblebug States His Case for the Court of Philistia

By James Branch Cabell

THEY of Polesies narrate that in the old days a court was held by the Philistines to decide whether or no King Jurgen should be relegated to limbo. And when the judges were prepared for judging, there came into the court a great tumblebug, rolling in front of him his loved and properly housed young ones.

This insect looked at Jurgen, and its pinners rose erect in horror. And the bug cried to the three judges, "Now, by St. Anthony! this Jurgen must forthwith be relegated to limbo, for he is offensive and lewd and lascivious and indecent."

"And how can that be?" says Jurgen. "You are offensive," the bug replied, "because you carry a sword, which I choose to say is not a sword. You are

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ing one of those vile makers of literature; indeed, I frightened him so that he hid away the greater part of what he had made until he was dead and I could not get at him. That was a disgusting trick to play on me, I consider. Still, these are the only three detected makers of literature that have ever infested Philistia, thanks be to goodness and my vigilance, but for both of which we might have been no more free from makers of literature than are the other countries."

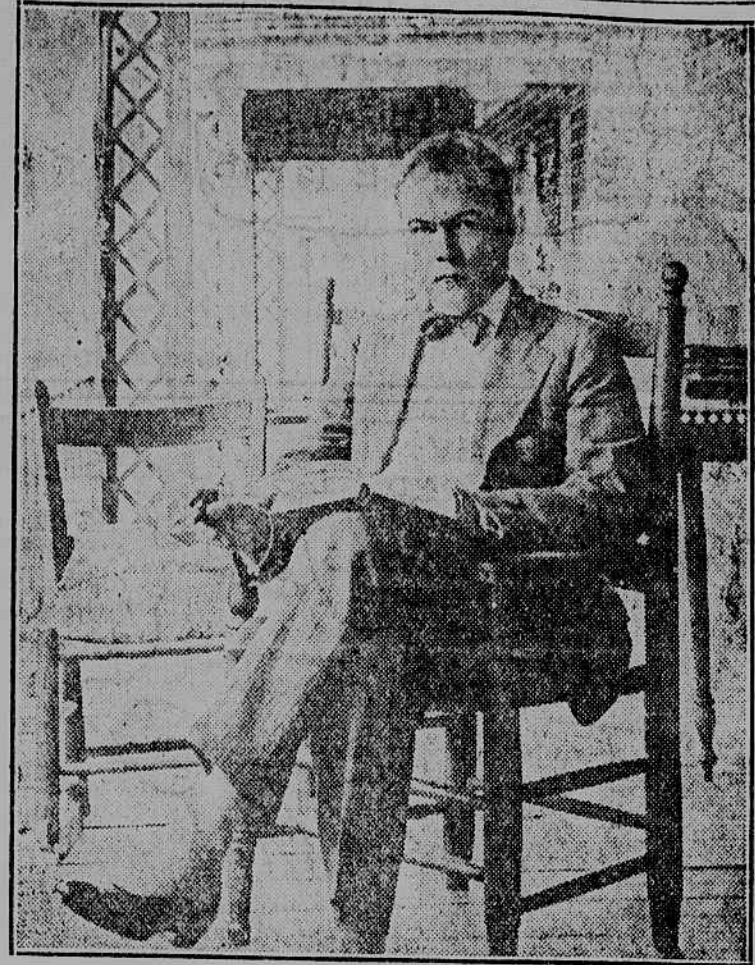
"Nay, but these three," cried Jurgen, "are the glories of Philistia; and of all that Philistia has produced, it is these three alone, whom living ye made least of, that to-day are honored wherever art is honored, and where nobody bothers one way or the other about Philistia!"

"What is art to me and my way of living?" replied the tumblebug, wearily. "I have no concern with art and letters and the other lewd idols of foreign nations. I have in charge the moral welfare of my young, whom I roll here before me, and trust, with St. Anthony's aid, to raise in time to be God-fearing tumblebugs like me. For the rest, I have never minded dead men being well spoken of; no, no, my lad, whatever I may do means nothing to you, and once you are really rotten you will find the tumblebug friendly enough. Meanwhile, I am paid to protect that living persons are offensive and lewd and lascivious and indecent, and one must live."

Jurgen now looked more attentively at this queer creature; and he saw that the tumblebug was malodorous certainly, but at bottom honest and well meaning; and that seemed to Jurgen the saddest thing he had found among the Philistines. For the tumblebug was sincere in his insane delings and all Philistia honored him sincerely, so that there was nowhere any hope for this people.

Therefore, King Jurgen addressed himself to submit, as his need was, to the strange customs of the Philistines. "Now do you judge me fairly," cried Jurgen to his judges, "if there be any justice in this insane country. And if there be none, do you relegate me to limbo, or to any other place, so long as in that place this tumblebug is not omnipotent and sincere and insane."

And Jurgen waited. . . .



JAMES BRANCH CABELL, author of "Jurgen," who defends himself against attacks of critics.

'The Rainbow' and 'Jurgen'

Cannan Says Posterity May Take Books Now Banned

By Gilbert Cannan

'Tis the voice of the sluggard
I heard him complain,
"You have waked me too soon,
You must call me again."

THE familiar jingle is the best possible diagnosis of the trouble in which those singular beings, D. H. Lawrence and James Branch Cabell, find themselves. Humanity's chief trouble is inertia, and those inconvenient persons who attempt to break it are frequently themselves broken. However, let us, above all, be good-tempered about it. If posterity wants "Jurgen" and "The Rainbow," posterity will print them. The present generation does not want them because they are in advance of current morality, and those whose idiosyncrasy it is to care for morals, to the exclusion of good sense and every other social consideration, demand their suppression.

In these matters there is no better text than that supplied by William Shakespeare in the line:
"Love is all truth; lust is all forged lies."

It may or may not be a good thing to suppress vice. Personally, as a libertarian, I incline to the view that every attempt to suppress only increases its frenzy, for, as they say, murder will out; but it is important that those who believe in attempting to suppress vice should learn to distinguish it from truth, otherwise they are apt to tamper not with the delusions of the human mind, but with its means of expression, than which it has no other means of development. Humanity wants to know the facts about itself and the need increases with its knowledge about the facts of everything else. Every new invention, every great social development imposes upon the writing artist a higher standard of integrity and urges him away from the charm and toward the necessity of his work. A modern novelist, living in a time of great stress and profound change, can no longer accept the convention which deprived the characters in a work of fiction of both passion and intelligence in order that novels might be read as easily and indolently as the newspaper, until at last novels came to be written as easily and indolently as they were read. Compared with such novels books like "Jurgen" and "The Rainbow" seem to be startling and violent. The men who wrote them have actually had the audacity to ignore the lassitude of the modern reader. They have discarded the superficial view of human relationships and have had the temerity to explore them. Lawrence insists upon their intensity, Cabell upon their transcendence; but both are good artists and are reverent before the wonder and mystery of their material. Unfortunately, the indolent modern mind, the sluggishness of its decadent Puritanism, sees none of the reverence and that is aware only of what seems to it the

honesty, but if they are so timid as all that there is no great loss.

The case of "The Rainbow" is of the two the more amusing, because if ever there was a morose, hard-boiled Cromwellian Puritan it is D. H. Lawrence, and for the Puritans to assail him is for them to show how little grasp they have of the logic of their own case. In "Jurgen," on the other hand, the Puritan may find his natural enemy, the aristocratic individual who does "not give a single damn," and then the Puritan is baffled, for no attack can impinge upon that individual's imperturbability.

The matter is serious and worth writing about at length, because modern society is hectic and confused for lack of the authority which only art can give it. Indeed, these periodic assaults upon books which are a few years ahead of their time are perverted expressions of the need of that authority which is withheld by, among other things, this pathetic confusion of pornography and literature. There should be a rallying of writers everywhere to make it plain to the public that literature cannot possibly be pornographic, and that there is no simple fact of human nature that cannot find expression in art. A dirty book is, God save us! a thing of nought. It must perish of its own decrepitude. A work of art is a thing of vital necessity and society tampers with it at its peril.

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